

Some months ago, I came up with an oddball sketch of a fantastical pop-up book that would start tiny and then eventually grow to many times its original folded size.



I was thinking, in part, of those weird sponges you buy as a child which you hope will create gigantic animals big enough to terrorize your neighborhood... but never do. I wanted to fulfill the kind of promise made from a disappointing toy like this, somehow building something impossible in the meantime.

As someone who grew up on the east coast, I was largely unaware of the cultural weight of the brave, lonely soul striking out on his own – Westerns meant nothing to me as a child and were laughable to me as an adult. But instead, I had built up my own ideas of the beauty of the solitary journey – through studying 20th century art, with its insistence on the “lone genius” out there, somewhere, on a limb, bravely ushering in history. As much as I like to think I’ve outgrown these ideas, they’re pretty deeply rooted – I can muse all I want about the interconnectedness of humans and nature and so on... the truth is, I still love Jackson Pollock and the myth he embodies. I know the myth isn’t real or true, and still I adore it.

And so all this came together as I started making this book – this impossible task coupled with this impossible notion. I liked the idea that I was taking on this project (building this huge pop-up) that no one had done before – so that I was on a ledge there, myself – but it was a very silly ledge to be on. If I succeeded, then... so what? So I would have built this enormous pop-up book. And... so?

To me this project came together to embody all that I love and hate about art – the ridiculousness of pursuing these strange, idiosyncratic projects in near-solitary confinement; the joy of sharing it with others, of taking a risk and of pushing yourself to a limit.



Around the same time, my husband and I had a conversation about the Old West and the image of The Cowboy– this lone figure, out discovering the west, bravely taking on the responsibility of furthering the plight of his young country by taking on brutal, thankless, and harsh work. Much can be said about this sort of myth and the portrayal of this icon so deeply connected with all things American – how it relates to the US’s position in the world, how Americans see ourselves, and so on – but one of the things that struck me was how silly it all was. Here was this cowboy, filmed on location in the desolate west, not a soul around except for his horse – and yet, in order to realize this image (to photograph or to film it) takes at least one other observer or, one assumes, an entire film crew. It takes lighting and makeup experts to get John Wayne to look that brave and true – not to mention all of us as an audience to watch him –and to appear that *alone*.

And in the end, I cheated: the book doesn’t really “pop-up” as much as it has to be carefully unfolded and assembled. I used a combination of techniques to build the book, including (yes) pop-ups (for the trees, girls, etc) and also a newer hobby called Papercraft, which blends origami with cut-and-paste models (that patterns for this hobby are traded online – one of my favorite places to be – only helped my fascination with it). My goal was that each piece of paper that went into the project could be folded down to fit into a pocket in the back, so that this book would serve as a prototype for a kind of “activity kit;” the viewer would purchase it all folded up and have to construct it bit by bit to reveal the story.



There is a pouch in the back where everything is stored.

To “read” this book correctly, you’d have to start with the completely disassembled version and go from there, piecing the story together as you read it – and also, making adjustments to the story as you made the piece fit the space it was filling. But since that’s not a possibility in a gallery situation, start in the middle and then work your way out to either side, walking around the entire piece to reveal all the text. That’s how you can read the whole “story.”